

THE GAY HISTORY SERIES – Lesson #3

The Faggot King Edward the Second (1284-1327)

Edward II known as Edward of Caernarvon, was King of England from 1307 until he was deposed by his wife Isabella and her nobleman lover in January 1327. He was the sixth Plantagenet king, in a line that began with the reign of Henry II. Between the strong reigns of his father Edward I and son Edward III, the reign of Edward II was disastrous for England, marked by sexual perversion, incompetence, political squabbling and military defeats.

Although widely accepted even at the time to have been primarily homosexual, Edward was apparently bi-sexual when expedient. He fathered at least five children, including his heir, the future Edward III, who later avenged his murder. Apparently, Edward fell madly in love with handsome young male favourites, first a Gascon knight named Piers Gaveston, later a young English lord named Hugh Despenser, and his inability to deny them even the most grandiose favours led to constant political unrest and his eventual deposition.

His father, Edward I, (the “Longshanks” of the *Braveheart* movie, played by Patrick McGoohan) had conquered Wales and parts of the Scottish lowlands, but never exerted a comprehensive hold on Scotland. However, the army of Edward II was devastatingly defeated at Bannockburn, freeing Scotland from English control and allowing Scottish forces to raid unchecked throughout the north of England.

The fourth son of Edward I by his first wife Eleanor of Castile, Edward II was born at Caernarvon Castle. He was the first English prince to hold the title Prince of Wales, which was formalised by the Parliament of Lincoln of February 7, 1301. The story ran that the conquered Welsh, who wanted to be ruled by one of their own, purportedly asked the old King to give them a prince who spoke no French or English, and Edward I complied by presenting them with his own infant son in swaddling clothes, who at that time spoke nothing at all.

Edward became heir apparent at just a few months of age, following the death of his elder brother. His father, a notable military leader, trained his heir in warfare and statecraft starting in his childhood, yet the effeminate young Edward preferred music, gardening, boating and craftwork, activities considered beneath kings at the time. The prince took part in several Scots campaigns, but in spite of these martial engagements, “all his father's efforts could not prevent his acquiring the habits of extravagance and frivolity which he retained all through his life”. The famous scene in *Braveheart* in which the old King angrily hurls his son's homosexual lover out of a window (which Mel Gibson refused to censor from the movie in spite of the shrieks of the organised homosexual lobby) does not appear to be based in fact, but it probably expresses adequately how the old tyrant felt about his son's pansy ways.

What Edward I did do was to attribute his son's - er, preferences - to his companion Piers Gaveston, a Gascon knight, and he exiled Gaveston from court after Prince Edward attempted to bestow on his friend a title reserved for royalty. Ironically, it was the King who had originally chosen Gaveston in 1298 to be a suitable friend for his son due to his wit, courtesy and abilities. Gaveston was athletic and handsome; he was a few years older than Edward, and had seen military service in Flanders before becoming Edward's close companion. He was known to have a quick, biting wit and to be a sharp dresser. (Sound familiar? Kind of like a Medieval Liberace.)

Edward I died on July 7, 1307, en route to another campaign against the Scots, a war that had become the hallmark of his reign. One chronicler relates that Edward had requested his son boil his body, extract the bones and carry them with the army until the Scots had been subdued. His son ignored the request, however, and had his father buried in Westminster Abbey. Then he recalled Gaveston immediately, created him Earl of Cornwall, gave him the hand of the king's niece, Margaret of Gloucester, (I'm sure this girl really appreciated the hell out of being married to the King's sodomite) and withdrew from the Scottish campaign. The barons and old veterans who had followed the old king were no doubt suitably impressed.

Edward was as physically impressive as his father, yet he lacked the drive and ambition of his forebear. It was written that Edward II was “the first king after the Conquest who was not a man of business”. His main interest was in entertainment, though he also took pleasure in athletics and mechanical crafts. “He had been so dominated by his father that he had little confidence in himself, and was often in the hands of a court favorite with a stronger will than his own,” which is basically a polite way of saying he was a sissy and a homosexual weakling.

But, under the mores of the times, he still had his dynastic duties to do. On January 25, 1308, Edward married Isabella of France, the daughter of King Philip IV of France, known as "Philip the Fair", and sister to three French kings, in an attempt to bolster an alliance with France. On February 25, the pair were crowned at Westminster Abbey. Almost immediately, she wrote to her father, Philip the Fair, complaining of Edward's behaviour. The marriage was doomed to failure from the beginning. Isabella was "frequently neglected" by her husband, who spent much of his time conspiring with Gaveston and other pretty boys regarding how to limit the powers of the peerage (the old nobles who had fought for his father for 35 years) in order to consolidate his father's legacy for himself.

In 1308, when Edward traveled to Boulogne to marry Isabella, he left Gaveston to act as Regent, literally giving this fruit the keys to the kingdom. Had Gaveston been halfway competent as an administrator and at least a little diplomatic, the barons might have worked with him, but he was an arrogant, preening queen who wore outrageous clothes and turned the royal court into a kind of Blackadder-style running joke, not to mention making a fool out of the King, stealing him from the Queen's bed, and running through the royal treasury like a JAP with a credit card on Fifth Avenue. Long story short, the barons instituted what amounted to a national insurrection, and succeeded in having Gaveston banished through the Ordinances of 1311, which were forced on the King by a group of noblemen called the Lords Ordainers in a manner similar to what was done to King John a century before, with the *Magna Carta*. Except this had nothing to do with constitutional liberties, but was an effort to stop history's first Gay Liberation movement.

Edward revoked the Ordinances and recalled his bugger boy, and by then the dukes and earls and whatnot had had enough. In 1312, the royal favourite was captured by the Earl of Warwick and turned over to the ruthless Thomas, Earl of Lancaster and his allies, who dragged Gaveston's candy ass out onto a hillside called Blacklow Hill where he was hacked to pieces, including having certain key organs removed. His head was then lopped off with a rusty sword by two Welshmen, who were chosen to add insult to injury. To this day, a monument called Gaveston's Cross remains on the site, south of Leek Wootton near Warwick.

Edward's grief over the death of Gaveston was profound. He kept the mangled remains of his body close to him for a number of weeks before the Church forcibly arranged a burial. (One can imagine the smell). Edward spent long years afterward focused on the destruction of those who had betrayed him and murdered Gaveston. For the time being, a truce had to be arranged, and in October 1312, the Earls of Lancaster, Warwick, Arundel and Hereford formally knelt to beg Edward's pardon and were "received once again into the King's grace". Yeah, right.

To be sure, contemporary sources stopped short of outright calling the King a faggot; that was still treason and a hanging, drawing, and quartering offence no matter how true it was. Instead they criticised Edward's infatuation with Piers Gaveston, to the extent that he ignored and humiliated his wife.

Chroniclers called the relationship excessive, immoderate, beyond measure and reason, and criticised his desire for wicked and forbidden sex. The Westminster chronicler claimed that Gaveston had led Edward to reject the sweet embraces of his wife; while the *Meaux Chronicle* (written several decades later when Edward was safely dead) took concern further and complained that Edward took too much delight in sodomy. It doesn't take too much reading between the lines.

Then Edward managed to top off personal perversion with military disaster. All this time, Robert the Bruce had been steadily reconquering Scotland. Each campaign begun by Edward, from 1307 to 1314, had ended in Robert clawing back more of the land that Edward I had taken during his long reign.

Robert's military successes against Edward II were due to a number of factors, not the least of which was the Scottish king's strategy. The term "guerrilla warfare" was not yet invented, but the Scots practised it. Bruce used small forces to trap an invading English army, took castles by stealth to preserve his troops, and used the land as a weapon against Edward by attacking quickly and then disappearing into the hills instead of facing the superior numbers of the English. Bruce united Scotland against its common enemy, and is quoted as saying that he feared more the dead king's bones (Edward I) than his living heir (Edward II). Perhaps old Longshanks had the right idea back in '07, demanding on his deathbed to be boiled down and still lead his army in skeletal form. By June of 1314, only Stirling Castle and Berwick remained under English control.

On June 23, 1314, Edward and an army of 20,000 foot soldiers and 3,000 cavalry faced Robert and his army of foot soldiers and farmers wielding 14 foot long pikes. Edward knew he had to keep the critical stronghold of Stirling Castle if there was to be any chance for English military success. The castle, however, was under a constant state of siege, and the English commander, Sir Phillip de Mowbray, had advised Edward that he would surrender the castle to the Scots unless Edward arrived by June 24, 1314, to relieve the siege. Edward could not afford to lose his last forward castle in Scotland. He decided therefore to gamble his entire army to break the siege and force the Scots to a final battle by putting its army into the field.

As is well known to history, he blew it. The Battle of Bannockburn was a catastrophe, the greatest victory the Scots ever achieved over the English, and it gained their independence for almost 400 years until a group of corrupt Scottish nobles allowed themselves to be bribed into the Action of Union in 1707. What with the Gaveston thing as well, a lot of people had less and less time for Edward the Second, especially his Queen, once Eddie found another male companion to sleep with rather than her.

Following Gaveston's death, the king increased favour to his nephew-by-marriage (who was also Gaveston's brother-in-law), Hugh Despenser the Younger. But, as with Gaveston, the barons were indignant at the privileges Edward lavished upon the Despenser father and son, who arrogantly rode the countryside with troops of armed men doing their will on anyone and everyone. It was the Gaveston situation all over again, except that unlike the pretty Gascon boy, the Despensers were actually competent men and just as ruthless and violent as their noble opponents, and they managed to hold power for almost a dozen years. Hugh Despenser the Elder was a canny old robber baron type who saw a chance to grasp power and took it. He appears to have had no qualms at all about pimping his handsome young son out to the Faggot King, and neither does Junior seem to have objected. Like all nobles of his stature, the younger Despenser was married. No one seems to have bothered to ask his wife what she thought of all this.

By 1320, the situation in England was again becoming dangerously unstable. In 1321, the Earl of Hereford, along with the Earl of Lancaster and others, took up arms against the Despenser family, and the King was forced into an agreement with the barons. On August 14 at Westminster Hall, accompanied by the Earls of Pembroke and Richmond, the King declared the Despenser father and son both banished. (You'd think the barons would have learned from the Gaveston affair that banishing didn't work, but I guess not). The victory of the barons proved their undoing. With the removal of the Despensers, many nobles, regardless of previous affiliation, attempted to move into the vacuum left by the two. Hoping to win Edward's favour, these nobles were willing to aid the King in his revenge against the barons and thus increase their own wealth and power. In following campaigns, many of the King's opponents were murdered, the Earl of Lancaster being beheaded in the presence of Edward himself.

With all opposition crushed, the King and the Despensers were left the unquestioned masters of England. At the York Parliament of 1322, Edward issued a statute which revoked all previous ordinances designed to limit his power and to prevent any further encroachment upon it. The King would no longer be subject to the will of Parliament, and the lords, prelates, and commons were to suffer his will in silence.

Opposition to Edward and the Despensers rule continued; in 1324 there was a foiled attempt on their lives, and in early 1325, John of Nottingham was placed on trial for involvement in a plot to kill them with magic.

But by now that passionate French lady, Queen Isabella, had gotten fed up with being alone in a cold empty bed at night, and she had acquired a lover, a swashbuckling knight named Sir Roger Mortimer. She fled to France with her son and the kingdom's heir, the future Edward the Third. Mortimer was imprisoned in the Tower of London, but escaped and joined his royal squeeze in Paris. In September 1326, Mortimer and Isabella invaded England. Edward was amazed by their small numbers of soldiers, and immediately attempted to levy an immense army to crush them. However, a large number of men refused to fight Mortimer and the Queen; Henry of Lancaster, for example, the son of the old earl who was executed by Edward, was not even summoned by the King. He showed his loyalties by raising an army, seizing a cache of Despenser treasure from Leicester Abbey, and marching south to join Mortimer. Soon, the invasion had too much force and support to be stemmed. As a result, the army the King had ordered, failed to emerge, and both Edward and the Despensers were left isolated. They abandoned London on October 2, leaving the city to fall into disorder. On October 15, a London mob seized and beheaded without trial John le Marshal (a Londoner accused of being a spy for the Despensers) and Edward II's Treasurer, Walter de Stapledon Bishop of Exeter, together with two of the Bishop's squires. The King took refuge first in Gloucester (where he arrived on October 9) and then fled to South Wales in order to make a defence in Despenser's lands. However, Edward was unable to rally an army, and on October 31, he was abandoned by his servants, leaving him with only the younger Despenser and a few retainers.

On October 27, the elder Despenser was accused of encouraging the illegal government of his son, enriching himself at the expense of others, despoiling the Church, and taking part in the illegal execution of the Earl of Lancaster. He was hanged and beheaded at the Bristol Gallows. Henry of Lancaster was then sent to Wales in order to fetch the King and the younger Despenser; on November 16, he caught Edward, Despenser and their soldiers in the open country near Tonyrefail, where a plaque now commemorates the event.

Despenser was sent to Isabella at Hereford whilst the king was taken by Lancaster himself to Kenilworth Castle. Hugh Despenser the Younger was brutally executed, and a huge crowd gathered in anticipation at seeing him die – a public spectacle for public entertainment. They dragged him from his horse, stripped

him, and scrawled Biblical verses against sodomy, corruption and arrogance on his skin. They dragged him into the city, presenting him in the market square to Queen Isabella, Roger Mortimer, and the Lancastrians. He was then condemned to hang as a thief, to be castrated as a sodomite, and then to be drawn and quartered as a traitor, his quarters to be dispersed throughout England. Queen Izzy got her revenge in spades.

With the King imprisoned, Mortimer and the Queen faced the problem of what to do with him. The simplest solution would be execution: his titles would then pass to Edward of Windsor, whom Isabella could control, while it would also prevent the possibility of his being restored. Execution would require the King to be tried and convicted of treason: and while most lords agreed that Edward had failed to show due attention to his country, executing an anointed King was considered going over the top. Besides, no one wanted to go into the whole homo thing publicly, which would have been very bad for morale and would have made England a laughing stock all over Europe.

Thus, at first, it was decided to have Edward imprisoned for life instead. However, the fact remained that the legality of power still lay with the King. Isabella had been given the Great Seal, and was using it to rule in the names of the King, herself, and their son as appropriate; nonetheless, these actions were illegal, and could at any moment be challenged. Plus Izzy and Roger weren't exactly popular themselves in certain quarters, and there was at least one attempt to stage an armed rescue of Edward II. They demanded that Edward abdicate, and he did - but in favor of his young son, not Isabella and Roger, and also clearly under duress. So there was only one thing left to do.

The government of Isabella and Mortimer was so precarious that they dared not leave the deposed king alive when he might fall into the hands of their political enemies. On April 3, Edward II was removed from Kenilworth and entrusted to the custody of two subordinates of Mortimer, then later imprisoned at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire where, it was generally believed, he was murdered on October 11, 1327.

At first it was rumored that Edward had been strangled. However, in 1352 when it was safe to do so, the chronicler Thomas de la Moore wrote an account of Edward's murder wherein it was stated that he was killed by being thrown face down over a table, tied or chained up, and then a red hot spit or poker was jammed through a leather funnel through his anus, cooking his intestines while alive and killing the King from shock. The ostensible purpose of this horrible form of execution was twofold: first, to inflict a poetically just and ironic punishment on a faggot through one last act of red hot buggery; and secondly to kill the King in a manner that ensured there were no visible wounds or marks on his body, so he could be displayed publicly and proven dead to the people. According to a centuries old local legend, his screams of agony were heard through the thick stone walls of the castle all the way down into the village of Berkeley.

Following the public announcement of the King's death, the rule of Isabella and Mortimer did not last long. On the night of October 19, 1330, in one of the most daring and dramatic exploits of the Middle Ages, the young King Edward III, aged seventeen, staged a *coup d'etat* that made him King in fact as well as name. Edward entered Nottingham Castle through a secret tunnel with a band of armed companions and crept through the castle corridors, silently cutting a few throats of guards as they passed. They surprised Queen Isabella and Mortimer in the sack. Being a good Christian son Edward remembered the commandment and so he didn't kill his mother, but he did have Mortimer dragged away to London and hanged at Tyburn for the murder of his father. He imprisoned his mother in Castle Rising in Norfolk, although to be fair they both seem to have mellowed with age, and later Eddie eased Mom's living conditions to that of a comfortable retirement. It is even recorded that they exchanged Christmas gifts, before she died in 1358.

Some historians have called Isabella "the She-Wolf of France" and implied that in view of the fact that she murdered a number of her political enemies, her boyfriend got the noose and her husband got a red-hot poker up his ass, she herself got off lightly. I don't know about that. Normally I don't have much time for women who shack up with a toy boy and murder their husbands, but let's face it, this lady put up with a lot in her day.